

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)

NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

PLANTATION MANAGEMENT

97

to the people themselves by the respectful title of Maum. The mistress herself or the overseer's wife was also usually present to assist the midwife at the confinement of a Negro woman. At Christmas the planter rewarded the granny by giving her 75 cents for each delivery during the year. He also might seek to encourage the mother to care for her child properly by giving her, perhaps, as much as a \$1 for every living child she had at Christmas. Henry A. Middleton, Jr.'s, practice was to give every woman with an infant one month old \$1 and the same amount to every woman with a year-old child. At Christmas in 1859, he rewarded twenty-six mothers with month-old infants, and fourteen mothers with year-old infants.⁸⁰

St. Helena planters allowed new-born infants "two of each garment and six diapers."⁸¹ The garments were flannel dresses, dresses of cotton checks, and jackets of homespun.⁸¹

As soon as a mother resumed work after confinement, she was often required to take her infant to a nurse or granny, whose task it was to take care of both the "lap babies" and the "knee babies" during working hours. Sometimes the same granny looked after the plantation babies year after year, while on other plantations this task was assigned to a group of women who took turns every month "minding child." Henry A. Middleton, Jr., rewarded the "monthly nurses" on his plantation "75c. for infants that live." As long as a mother suckled her infant, she left her work in the field at stated intervals to do so, or an older child brought the baby to the field to be fed.

⁸⁰ Wechaw Plantation Book.

⁸¹ Port Royal Letters, p. 44.

⁸² Wechaw Plantation Book.

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98

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE SEA ISLANDS

567
• 853
162 After eight months the child was put on a diet of vegetables, milk, and starches prepared, on the best managed plantation, by a special cook assigned to that task. On Weehaw plantation the children's allowance was given out every morning and cooked for them three times a day. They had vegetable soup every day and rice for dinner three times a week. While the potatoes lasted, they had potatoes every day for breakfast. During the winter they had molasses three times a week and milk on alternate days. After May first, however, they had molasses every day until milk was again used in winter.⁶²

567
165 Despite this special attention, the proportion of children in the total number of deaths on Weehaw was high. In 1856 six out of eleven deaths were of infants under one year; in 1857 thirty-three out of forty deaths were of children under three years; in 1858 twelve out of fourteen were of children under two; in 1859 fourteen out of eighteen were of children under one; in 1860 thirteen out of twenty were of children. The causes of death as listed by the planter were as follows: diarrhea, pneumonia, debility, fever, spasms, lockjaw, dysentery, convulsions, accident, cholera, worms, and teething, with the largest number dying of lockjaw.

(164)
165 It must not be overlooked that the infant death rate among the whites was also high. Planters on St. Helena Island seem to have had as much difficulty in rearing their own children as those of their Negroes. The tombstones still standing in the cemeteries there show that parents sometimes lost four or five infants in succession. James A. Pope lost five children under six years of age

⁶² *Ibid.*